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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/30/2008

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SUBJECT: TAIWAN AT THE HOLY SEE: CLINGING TO ITS LAST
TOEHOLD IN EUROPE?

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR JIM NICHOLSON FOR REASONS 1.5 (B)(D)

11. (U) SUMMARY: WHILE TAIWAN IS WELL AWARE THAT THE HOLY SEE WILL SHIFT ITS DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS TO BEIJING AS SOON AS IT CAN; TAIPEI CONTINUES TO USE ITS LAST EMBASSY IN EUROPE TO PRESENT ITSELF AS A MATURE DEMOCRATIC STATE THAT PLAYS A CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE IN THE ADVANCEMENT OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN ALL OF CHINA AND THROUGHOUT ASIA. DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN TAIWAN AND THE HOLY SEE OFFER UNIQUE ADVANTAGES TO EACH. FOR TAIWAN, RELATIONS WITH THE HOLY SEE REPRESENT A PRESTIGIOUS LAST STAND IN EUROPE, ALLOWING
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CONTACT BETWEEN TAIWANESE DIPLOMATS AND THE 71 OTHER MISSIONS TO THE HOLY SEE RESIDENT IN ROME. TO THE HOLY SEE, THESE RELATIONS ARE BOTH A BARGAINING CHIP IN ITS DIALOGUE WITH THE PRC AND A MEANS TO SUPPORT THE 300,000 CATHOLICS IN TAIWAN. FOR NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PRC AND THE HOLY SEE TO TAKE PLACE, THE PRC INSISTS ON THE HOLY SEE BREAKING ITS TIES WITH TAIWAN, WHILE THE HOLY SEE INSISTS THAT PRC RECOGNIZE THE FUNDAMENTAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM EMBEDDED IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND THE POPE. THE TAIWAN MISSION TO THE HOLY SEE TAKES FULL ADVANTAGE OF ITS PRESENCE IN ROME TO INTERACT WITH THE DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY, ENGAGE BROADER EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY, AND MAKE THE MOST OF ONE OF THEIR BEST LISTENING POSTS. END SUMMARY.

A JEWEL IN TAIWAN'S DIPLOMATIC CROWN

12. (U) JUST AS THE SITUATION OF THE CHURCH IN CHINA IS SOMEWHAT AMBIGUOUS, SO IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TAIPEI AND VATICAN CITY. THE HOLY SEE IS THE ONLY EUROPEAN STATE THAT MAINTAINS DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH TAIWAN. DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WERE FIRST ESTABLISHED IN 1942, AND THE HOLY SEE CONTINUED RELATIONS WITH THE NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT WHEN, IN 1950, THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS IN BEIJING SEVERED TIES WITH THE HOLY SEE AS A PART OF THEIR BROADER EFFORTS TO PURGE CHINA OF FOREIGN INFLUENCES. THE HOLY SEE MAINTAINS ITS DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN CHINA FROM HONG KONG, NOT TAIPEI, TO SIGNAL THIS IS A "TEMPORARY" SITUATION THAT AWAITS NORMALIZATION IN ITS DIPLOMATIC TIES TO BEIJING. ASYMMETRICALLY, THE HOLY SEE PERMITS TAIPEI TO MAINTAIN A FULL EMBASSY HERE IN ROME. THUS
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FOR TAIPEI, APART FROM THE STAR-CROSSED ADVENTURE IN MACEDONIA, THEIR DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN THE VATICAN REPRESENTS A LAST TOEHOLD IN EUROPE. TO THE HOLY SEE, DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH TAIWAN REPRESENT A BARGAINING CHIP THAT IT WOULD NOT HESITATE TO USE IN ORDER TO GAIN NORMALIZED RELATIONS WITH THE PRC (AND ITS TEN MILLION CATHOLICS). THE HOLY SEE APPEARS CONTENT TO HOLD ON TO THIS CARD WHILE ATTEMPTING TO REOPEN DIALOGUE WITH BEIJING. THE TAIWANESE RECOGNIZE THAT PRC INSISTENCE ON SEVERING HOLY SEE/TAIWAN TIES BEFORE CHINA/HOLY SEE RELATIONS CAN BE ESTABLISHED IS A SWORD OF DAMOCLES HANGING OVER THEM. ITS THREAD, HOWEVER, SHOWS NO SIGNS OF FRAYING JUST YET.

13. (C) THE TAIWAN EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE SEEKS TO CAPITALIZE ON THIS FULL DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE BY VIGOROUSLY WORKING ALL THE CONTACTS AVAILABLE TO IT TO ASSOCIATE TAIWAN WITH THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN IMPERATIVES OF HOLY SEE FOREIGN POLICY. AMBASSADOR RAYMOND TAI, A SEASONED TAIWAN DIPLOMAT, MISSES NO OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW THE TAIWAN FLAG AT VATICAN-RELATED OFFICIAL AND SOCIAL EVENTS. TAI HAS STATED THAT HE IS "GREATLY HONORED TO REPRESENT ALL FREEDOM AND PEACE-LOVING CHINESE PEOPLE AT THE VATICAN, WHERE THE PAPACY IS A STAUNCH DEFENDER OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS." THIS THEME WAS ESTABLISHED WHEN TAI PRESENTED HIS CREDENTIALS TO THE POPE. THE POPE SAID, "TAIWAN IS FREE!" TO WHICH TAI REPLIED "LET'S JOIN HANDS IN MAKING MAINLAND CHINA FREE." TAIWAN'S PRESENCE AT THE HOLY SEE ALSO OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES TO MONITOR AND INTERACT WITH CLERGY WHO COME AND GO FROM WITHIN CHINA AND WHO OFTEN WORK WITH ISOLATED CHINESE COMMUNITIES. THE EUROPEAN BASE FURTHER OFFERS TAI A SPRINGBOARD TO SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS EUROPE-WIDE, WHERE HE
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INVARIABLY PRESENTS TAIWAN AS A STAUNCH DEFENDER OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS.

WORKING ALL THE ANGLES

13. (U) REFLECTING THE IMPORTANCE IT PLACES ON ITS LAST TOEHOLD IN EUROPE TAIWAN MAINTAINS A COMPARATIVELY LARGE AND ACTIVE STAFF IN ITS EMBASSY. EMBASSY STAFF MAINTAIN AN ACTIVE PRESENCE AT ALL OFFICIAL FUNCTIONS AS WELL AS MANY SOCIAL FUNCTIONS. THEY HAVE SOUGHT TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY IN ADVANCING HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES, SUPPORTING AN

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO LOG-00 AIT-03 EAP-00 TEDE-00 IO-00 P-00 SAS-00
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R 130517Z MAR 03
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
AMEMBASSY BEIJING
AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL SHANGHAI
AMCONSUL SHENYANG
AIT TAIPEI

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ANTI-TRAFFICKING CONFERENCE AND ENGAGING IN A RECENT BIOTECH IN AFRICA SEMINAR POST HOSTED AT AN OFF-SITE LOCATION. THE TAIWAN STAFF IS ADEPT AT KEEPING THE PULSE OF THE DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY BY FREQUENTLY 'WINING AND DINING' DIPLOMATS RESIDENT IN ROME, AND ORGANIZING FAREWELL DINNERS FOR COLLEAGUES IN THE BROADER DIPLOMATIC CORPS. THE TAIWAN EMBASSY WAS SECOND ONLY TO THE USG IN DONATIONS TO THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON THE TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS HELD AT THE GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY IN ROME IN MAY 2002. TAIWAN ALSO SEEKS TO ASSOCIATE ITSELF WITH THE COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRATIC NATIONS IN THE HOLY SEE DIPLOMATIC CORPS. IN FACT, THEY ARE ALSO

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GENEROUS WITH FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR DIVERSE CONFERENCES AND CHARITABLE PROJECTS. TAIWAN EMBASSY FIRST SECRETARY PETER TING RECENTLY TOLD POLOFF THAT A KEY GOAL OF HIS EMBASSY IS TO ACTIVELY SEEK OPPORTUNITIES TO COLLABORATE WITH THE U.S. EMBASSY.

AFTER THE HOLY SEE ESTABLISHES RELATIONS WITH PRC

14. (C) THE TAIWAN EMBASSY IS WELL AWARE OF THE HOLY SEE'S DESIRE TO RE-ESTABLISH NORMALIZED RELATIONS WITH THE PRC. THEY ARE ALSO AWARE THAT THE HOLY SEE IS READY AND WILLING TO CUT DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH TAIWAN IN ORDER TO MAKE THIS POSSIBLE. PETER TING TOLD POLOFF THAT THERE IS SPECULATION THAT FAIRLY LARGE CHANGES COULD OCCUR WITH THE NEW PRC GOVERNMENT, AND THESE COULD BEGIN UNLOCKING THE HOLY SEE/BEIJING DIALOGUE ON NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS. WHILE TAIWAN LOATH TO LOSE ITS LAST DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN EUROPE, IT DOES WANT TO ASSIST IN BRINGING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS TO CHINA, EVEN AT THE COST OF LOSING THAT MISSION. AFTER THE HOLY SEE TRANSFERS DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS TO PRC, TAIWAN WOULD LIKELY CONTINUE CULTURAL RELATIONS OUT OF ITS CO-LOCATED TRADE OFFICE TO ITALY, MAINLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE. WHILE CURRENT PLANNING IS TO MERGE THE CURRENT MISSION WITH THE TRADE OFFICE, THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A CULTURAL OFFICE TO THE HOLY SEE IS BEING CONSIDERED.

COMMENT

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15. (C) POST SOMETIMES MUST HOLD OUR TAIWAN FRIENDS AT ARM'S LENGTH BECAUSE OF THEIR DETERMINED ATTEMPTS TO ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH THE USG. AN EXAMPLE IS THEIR INSISTENCE ON "JOINING THE US" IN SUPPORTING AN ANTI-TRAFFICKING PROJECT

FUNDED BY PD/ECA. AMBASSADOR TAI INVITED AMBASSADOR NICHOLSON, THEN DCM AND POLOFF TO JOIN THE TAIWAN DELEGATION IN PRESENTING A CHECK TO THE CARITAS PROJECT IMPLEMENTERS. WE POLITELY DECLINED, SIMPLY REFERRING THEM TO THE CARITAS OFFICE. THAT SAID, THE TAIWANESE, TOGETHER WITH OUR OTHER "ACTION ORIENTED" COLLEAGUES SUCH AS THE IRISH, CANADIANS AND AUSTRIANS, ARE A USEFUL ALLY IN GAINING THE SUPPORT OF COLLEAGUES TO ADVANCE ISSUES WITHIN THE STOLID HOLY SEE DIPLOMATIC CORPS. AS NOTED ABOVE, TAIWAN ASSISTANCE WAS HELPFUL IN OUR EFFORTS TO HOLD A MAJOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS LAST MAY. POST WILL CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE TAIWANESE ACTIVISM AT THE HOLY SEE WITHOUT CROSSING ANY DIPLOMATIC "RED LINES" IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM.

16. (C) TAIWAN MOREOVER IS EXTREMELY ACTIVE IN THE "ASIA GROUP" OF EMBASSIES ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE. AMBASSADOR TAI FACILITATED OUR EMBASSY'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ASIA GROUP'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN DECEMBER OF 2001. AMBASSADOR NICHOLSON SPOKE ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF COMBATING INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM AT THAT MEETING WITH TAI'S HELP, OVERCOMING THE OBJECTIONS OF THE IRANIAN AMBASSADOR.

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